

Career Information and Counselors: Frontline Team for Informed and Considered Career Decisions

Counselors provide critical services that facilitate the career development activities of their clients. Whether proactive or responsive, these services personalize and place in context career information. Accurate, current, local and national career information is necessary to explore career opportunities and make realistic plans. Counselors enable their clients to make use of this information.

Among the myriad services that counselors provide, they play a critical role in career development by:

- Assisting elementary students to gain awareness of the connection between school and work,
- Helping middle-school students to explore future work and leisure,
 - Facilitating high school students plan post high school options,
 - Consulting with adults seeking retraining
 - Instructing college students in applying for their first professional positions, and
 - Helping many other clients make informed and considered career decisions.



In all cases, the quality of career information impacts the quality of the counseling experience.

Authorized under the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act of 1998 (P.L. 105-332), Employment and Occupational Information – or

America's Career Resource Network (ACRN) as it was named by the Department of Education - produces and distributes career information in all fifty U.S. states and territories. Through partnerships between public and private entities, the network is the focal point for the development of high quality career information.

Career information includes information about occupations, industries, education and training programs and providers, financial aid, decision-making, and job seeking. High quality career information is distinguished by its readability, accuracy, and audience appropriateness. Research shows that career information delivered by counselors is much more powerful than information by itself.

The diagram depicts how counseling professionals and their respective professional networks increase the value of career information. The ring labeled career information systems (e.g., state-based or national CIDS) combines various types of career information and provides assessment and search capabilities. The ring labeled career services represents comprehensive guidance, career counseling, career consultation, and many other services provided by counselors

In providing career services, counselors employ career information and career information delivery systems by applying them to the career development needs of their clients. A central goal of the career development process is to facilitate an informed and considered career decision (ICCD), which is characterized by higher levels of educational attainment, income, mental and physical health, and job satisfaction. Likewise, ICCDs are associated with lower levels of unemployment, work-related illness, job stress, and employment insecurity.

Utilizing high quality career information, the work of counselors is vital to achieving this important outcome of the career development process.

Increasingly, career development is a vital part of preparing for the Twenty-first Century workforce. Today's complex job market requires workers to have more education and skill than ever before. The work environment confronting young people and workers of all ages demands high levels of work-related skills and, increasingly, skills in career self-management. The task for counselors is to prepare their clients for a labor market that is volatile, highly competitive, and global.

For individuals to thrive in such conditions, they must be able to negotiate complex dynamic networks, understand their own skills and interests, and be able to market themselves as the need arises. People will need to be able to parlay their work experiences into new employment opportunities and may need to do this frequently. Current estimates are that as many as 14 million workers need career counseling annually, and that one in six workers will change jobs in any given year.

The importance of high quality career information to the counseling process has never been greater. While support for counseling comes from many federal and state sources, the principal national investment in career information is through Employment and Occupational Information (Section 118) of the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act. The Perkins Act is in a strong position to be reauthorized this year. However, providing adequate funding for these critical programs is of great concern. A failure to support Section 118 of Perkins due to tight federal budgets will jeopardize the delivery of career information to practitioners. Should Occupational and Employment Information be eliminated, counselors may find themselves without vital resources for assisting their clients. At a minimum, the cost of career information would increase, and many schools and public agencies would lose their most valuable tool for enabling their students and clients to make informed and considered career decisions.

ACRNA calls on counselors and counseling organizations to join in support of career information to ensure that our collective work on behalf of students and workers can proceed unimpaired.

For more information, please contact America's Career Resource Network Association (ACRNA) at 703/549-8900. See also "The Educational, Social, and Economic Value of Informed and Considered Career Decisions," available online at <http://www.acrna.net/publications/iccd-sub1.pdf>.

